DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 931 UD 021 295

AUTHOR	Mangum, Margaret
TITLE	Face to Face: Introduction to the People and History of Cuba. LIRS Manual for Sponsors of Refugees.
INSTITUTION	Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of State, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	80
NOTE	16p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly. Not available in paper copy due to institution's restriction. For related documents, see UD 021 293-294.
AVAILABLE FROM	Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010 ($1.00).
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cubans; *Cultural Background; Cultural Pluralism; Economic Factors; Hispanic Americans; Immigrants; Latin American Culture; *Latin American History; Political Influences; *Refugees; Religion; Social Influences
IDENTIFIERS	Castro (Fidel); *Cuba

ABSTRACT

This manual, prepared for sponsors of Cuban refugees, describes the background of the newest refugees by explaining their history, culture, ethnic diversity, religion, customs, and the current Cuban social, political, and economic climate. (Author/MR)

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MAR 5 1981

Face to Face:

Introduction to the People and History of Cuba

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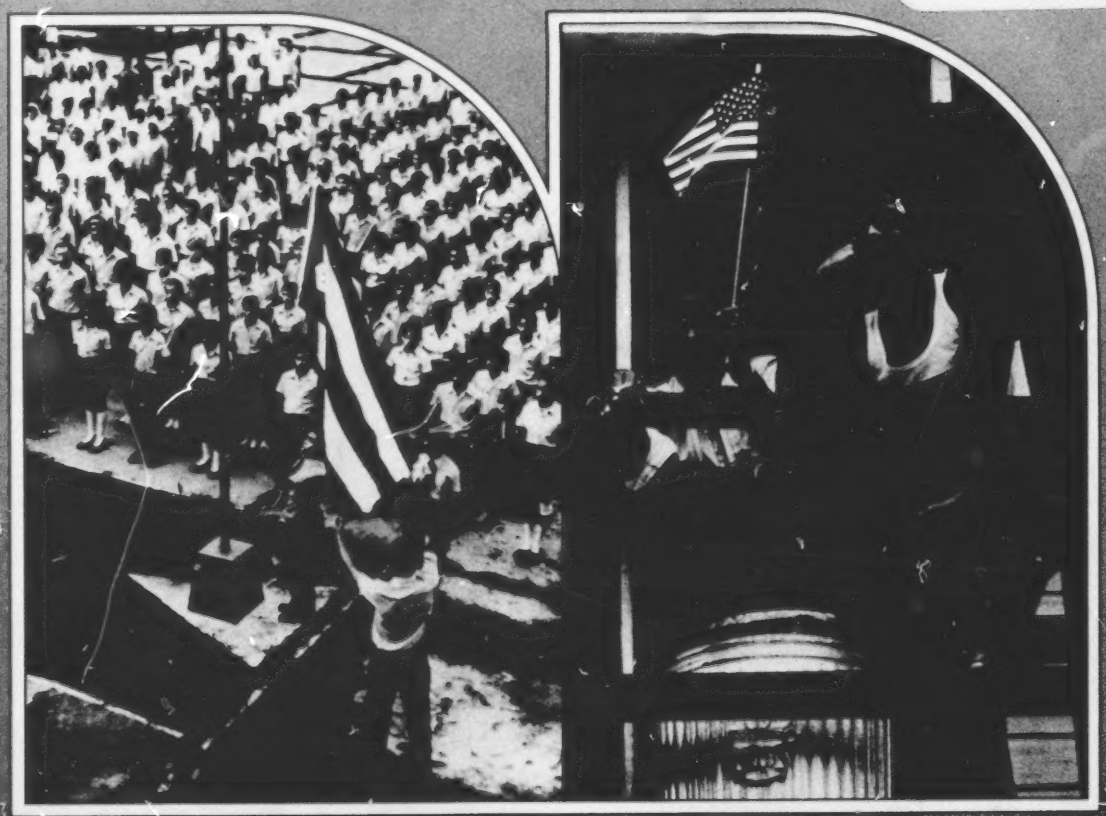


LIRS Manual for Sponsors of Refugees

FOREWORD

"There go the ships . . ." is a phrase from Psalm 104.

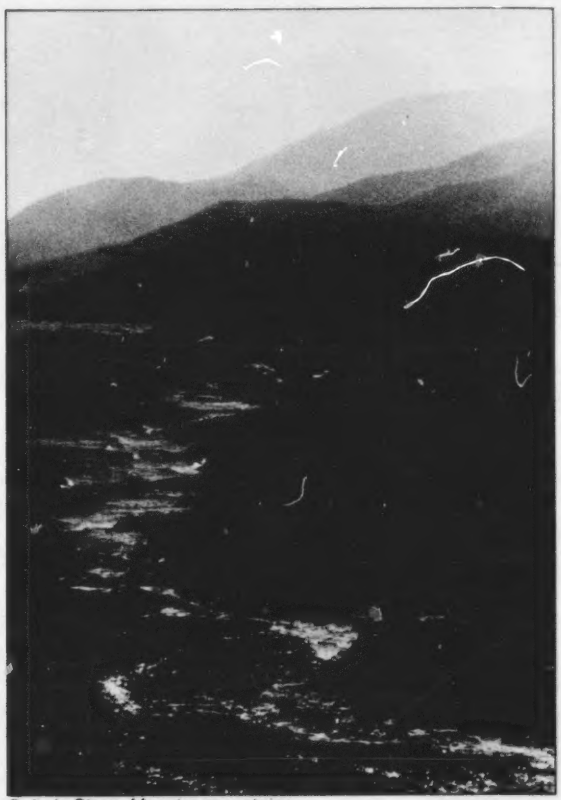
For all who live in the United States the phrase should be, "Here come the ships." They have been coming since this continent was discovered, some large, some mere cockleshells. Our harbors remain open, and the land stretches to receive the newcomers.

For all of us who are Christian, the ships must always come, and we must stand on the shores to welcome the strangers.

We have been doing that since 1975 for the many Indochinese refugees who have sought new lives in our society. Many still wait in crowded camps overseas, and we must continue to welcome them to our shores.

The arrival in 1980 of approximately 130,000 refugees from Cuba plus the presence of 15,000 Haitian refugees once again called upon the combined resources of Lutheran congregations, LIRS and other voluntary resettlement agencies, and our government.

When the "freedom flotilla" began to arrive at Key West, Fla., nuclei of experience emerged and proliferated. An organizational structure put together to help the 800,000 Cubans who came here following Fidel Castro's takeover in 1959 was still in place in Miami to give immediate help to the newcomers.



Cuba's Sierra Maestra mountains

LIRS was among the voluntary agencies which swung into action. It opened offices to interview and process the refugees in Miami and subsequently at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, Indiantown Gap Military Reservation in Pennsylvania and Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. The Florida centers also began processing refugees from Haiti already here.

In May 1980 at the 14th annual meeting of the Lutheran Council in the USA, parent agency of LIRS, representatives of the American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches authorized the spending of up to $75,000 to get the new refugee program going. The four churches later gave $275,000 for ongoing support, since the usual government funding to help with the initial resettlement of refugees was not readily available. The Lutheran World Federation sent $70,000.

The council's annual meeting voted to "urge the judicatory units and congregations of the participating church bodies to respond expeditiously to the need of sponsorships . . . for the Cuban and Haitian refugees with the same compassion as they have traditionally displayed for other oppressed groups."

Your receiving this manual, one of a series prepared by LIRS to introduce sponsors to various refugee groups, means you have agreed to help one or more Cubans or are seriously considering doing so.

Sponsorship involves a moral commitment to provide housing and jobs for the refugees and to reach out in friendship to give them the needed emotional support and orientation to life in the United States.

"Introduction to the People and History of Cuba" is intended to help you understand the Cuban refugees you sponsor. The text was written by Margaret "Peg" Mangum, a free-lance writer and editor from New York City. Photos are by the following: Megan Mangum of Paradise Falls, Pa.; George Cohen and Sandra Levinson, courtesy of the Center for Cuban Studies; and Fred Ward, from the New York City agency Black Star.

This manual was produced in cooperation with the Lutheran Council's Office of Communication and Interpretation. Costs were paid by a grant from the federal government.

CONTENTS

With New Eyes	1
The Way Life Was	2
The Way Life Is	3
Pearl of the Antilles	4
The Indigenous Heritage	5
Spanish Conquistadores	6
Britain's Brief Rule	8
Sugar and Slavery	9
"Free" at Last	10
Fidel! Fidel!	11

With New Eyes

A refugee resettlement ministry offers a unique challenge and opportunity. Sponsors are able to reach out to newcomers in friendship and support across the barriers of language and the unconscious, ingrained mores and habits of differing cultures. The refugees who come as your responsibility, if you remain open to them as the persons they are, may possibly teach you more about yourself and your own culture than any book you read, course you take or other situation in which you find yourself.

You will begin to look with new eyes at all kinds of things you have heretofore taken for granted. You will discover that you use idiomatic phrases that mean one thing in the dictionary and another in common usage. Both you and your refugee friends will enjoy hearty laughs at the singular peculiarities of "Americanese" and at the newcomers' attempts to gain proficiency in conversation.

You may find yourself up against an unconscious stereotype or personal prejudice that you had hidden from yourself, despite all the goodwill and love that you want to project. This can be a shocker, but it can also lead you to a whole new way of looking at life and listening to other people. By the same token, your refugee friends probably have many preconceptions of you and the United States that they may have to discard.

Cuban refugees present their own special challenge and opportunity. They arrived during a time of anxiety and uptightness intensified by a presidential election and economic problems. The political campaign hardened loyalties and aroused emotions. The job market was tight, and prices were soaring. The "doomsday prophets," hard at work in conversations and the media, added to the general malaise.

Your sponsorship of the Cuban people can be your personal answer to the forces of pessimism. Those forces believe that locking the doors of our country will somehow preserve the peace and plenty they claim is our right. Christians know that we are only God's stewards of the many resources he has given us.

Much of our nation's wealth is in the diversity of its people and the varied talents they have brought to our cultural mix. Once again, large numbers of Cubans are plunging into the melting pot. Cubans have come here before, exiles from bygone eras or events of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Through the experiences of every generation of Cuban refugees has run the common history of a people sharing the dream of freedom.

The refugees who came from Cuba two decades ago had grown up in a capitalistic society. Most of them had at least participated nominally in the nation's religious life and had incorporated into their value systems ethics founded on the Judeo-Christian heritage. In that wave were many professionals and people with intellectual training.

The refugees who arrived in the recent "freedom flotilla" are the product of a different society. They are used to a government which has told them what to do and when to do it and which stifled their individualism. They have no real comprehension of free enterprise, private ownership, the attainability of goods, freedom of speech and other guarantees embodied in our nation's Bill of Rights. They have come from a land in which religion is officially abolished.

The new refugees include those who were branded by Fidel Castro's regime as "undesirables" and were forced into the flotilla's boats by the Cuban military. Many of them have no trust because they have experienced promises by their government which were not fulfilled. Some are weary of political persecution and even afraid for their lives. Some have spent time in jail for what our legal system would consider misdemeanors. They were held past their period of servitude, and once released they were branded as unemployable.

The plight of one family which would not support the Castro government was described by the wife and mother, now starting a new life in North Carolina: "First they took away my husband's job as a hospital administrator. Then they took away our ration cards so we couldn't get food. Then my husband was thrown into jail as a political prisoner."

When some of the first boats arrived at Key West in April 1980, a LIRS staff person, herself a Cuban refugee from the 1960's, went to the harbor to witness what was happening and help process the newcomers. Knowing the temperament of her own people, she was surprised by the quietness of the arrivals. She learned that they were paralyzed by fear, unable to move or speak. The sight of U.S. Marines in uniform had caused them to conclude that they had been lied to "once again," that their boats had run in circles, and that they had been returned to Cuba to be taken to prison.

The following sections of this manual sketch the factors that have contributed to who and what the new Cuban refugees are—their history, culture, ethnic diversity, religion, politics, economics, customs and habits. Naturally the manual cannot include the background details and particular experiences of the individuals you are sponsoring. They will need to help you fill in the outline provided here. Then perhaps, with patience and friendship, you will be able to help them regain and rebuild faith, hope and trust.

1

The Way Life Was

Cuba has a remarkably diverse population which was estimated at 9,500,000 in 1977. Sixty per cent of the people live in urban areas. Havana, the capital, is the biggest city with a population of 1,500 000. Other major cities include Santiago de Cuba with 315,000 citizens and Camagüey with 222,000.

The people's work centers primarily on agriculture. Cuba has been the largest sugar exporting country in the world. Tobacco and tobacco products are its second largest exports. Because so much of its economy is agricultural, Cuba has usually imported manufactured goods, although rice, an important part of the people's diet, is also imported.

About 10,000 miles of railroads were constructed before the Castro regime to connect the sugar plantations with the major cities. A central highway extends over 700 miles, nearly the length of the island, and over 3,000 miles of other public roads exist.

The communications network includes television and radio stations in the major cities as well as telephone and telegraph lines between cities and smaller towns.

Because the island nation is only about the same size as Pennsylvania, no Cuban lives very far from his or her roots. Cuban families have always been close, unified and extended. Family members were not only parents and children but also grandparents, other elderly relatives and cousins. Even third and fourth cousins were considered as close as siblings. Families have thought of themselves as units, and tradition strengthened the bonds.

Recent customs of Cuban families differed greatly from that of families in the USA in the middle of the 20th century. Parents welcomed children back home after their education was completed. Often a young married couple continued to live in a parental home, and the father, if he had the means, expected to support them financially. Responsibility for offspring remained a major force for family unity.

The role of women in Cuba also differed from their counterparts in the USA and even from women in some other Latin American countries. Cuban women remained in the home long after those in the rest of the hemisphere had stepped into the marketplace.

Boys and girls were educated together in elementary school but were separated once they reached high school age.

Courtship customs in Cuba have had their own rituals. In Cuba's provinces, as in other Latin American countries, the procedure was for young men and women to stroll nightly around the village square. With chaperones sitting watchfully on the sidelines, the young women strolled in clusters in one direction about the square. The young men, eyes out for a likely choice, circled in the opposite direction. Pairing off to stroll together was a signal that a couple was interested in each other. But future dates always took place with mother, grandmother or, as a last resort, a maid in strict chaperonage to see that decorum reigned.

Cuban culture flourished in its native music and dances: the rhumba, mambo, cha-cha-cha and a multitude of other exotic rhythms and dance steps. Many of them had their origins among Cubans of African descent.

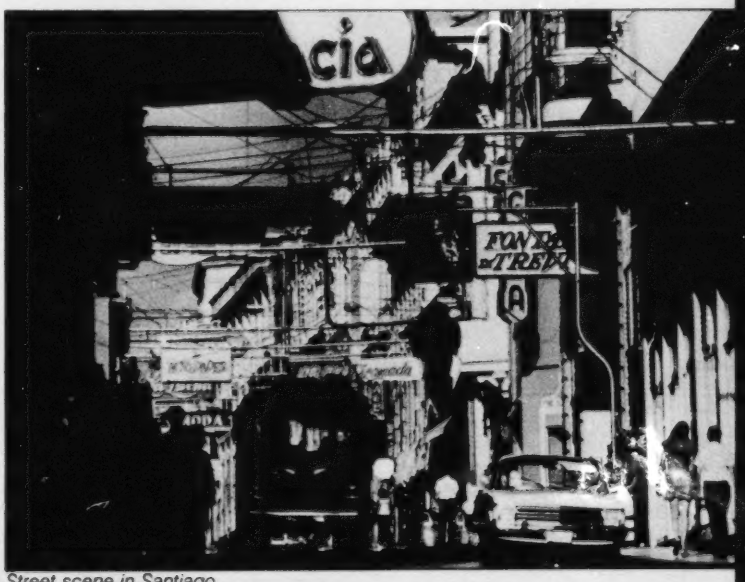
Cuba had its own literati and artists. Those who gained national acclaim could command good prices for their works.

Cock fighting and dog races were national Cuban pastimes, and gambling on these sports often reached fevered pitch. Private social clubs abounded, where Cubans practiced sports like baseball, soccer, golf and even football.

Past economic ties to the United States brought many North American interests, hobbies and values to Cuba which were then incorporated with zest into the nation's life.

But the poor remained poor, and life was hard. For those with money life was full of pleasure. That part of the populace could turn a deaf ear and blind countenance toward the corruption and graft that through the decades were habitual in governmental life because of a lack of popular involvement.

One Cuban, Fidel Castro, who was born August 13, 1926, on a ranch in Oriente Province, took up the interests of the poor. His efforts eventuated in transforming the socioeconomic structure, bringing radical change to the lives of all Cubans, and his becoming a symbol of Socialist revolution known throughout the world.



Street scene in Santiago

The Way Life Is

In Fidel Castro's Cuba today Cubans live in a reality that has little resemblance to the Cuba of the past. Like it or not, he has been a master organizer. Virtually everything is planned, controlled and in the hands of the government.

Cuban society is organized on a system of blocs. About 60 people belong to each bloc, depending on the number in a given area. Bloc members vote on their leaders: president, organizer, financial representative and "vigilance" official. The bloc's responsibilities cover recreation, sports and culture for the area. Also supervised are voluntary work and the use of raw materials.

The Communist Party has become the political base for the central government, and all citizens 27 and older are supposed to belong to the party. Young people from 12 to 27 are members of the Union of Communist Youths. A university student federation is officially recognized.

At the hub of the Cuban governmental wheel is the Central Committee, from which the Polit Bureau is chosen. Fidel Castro dominates all as president, prime minister and commander in chief.

Always the government comes before the individual, and each individual is expected to serve the nation in every possible way. Units which enforce this expectation are the PNR, the national police of the revolution; the G2, in charge of state security; and the DTI, the technical department in charge of investigations.

Cuban citizens are obliged to serve in the military for three years, during which time they receive $7 per month. Anyone over 16 can be called. After active duty they must remain in the reserve until they reach 45. In addition to combat preparation, military personnel help with the sugarcane harvest, construction or anything else that is needed.

For those not in the military employment is handled by the Ministry of Work. Workers must be at least 18. The ministry has branches in each municipality and fills all work positions there. Ministry staff members pick out jobs for applicants based on their experience, education and background. Individuals seeking work may have interviews for a maximum of seven jobs, one at a time. They are issued three-day passes for interviews on job sites. Failure to accept one of the positions can mean a jail sentence. Those accepted for employment are put on a one-month probation.

Girls head from the fields to classrooms.

All production goals and plans for the nation's agriculture are made by the government. The rural population is allowed to grow food on the side, but the state takes a share of the produce.

Food is rationed and scarce, including the staples rice, beans, coffee and even sugar. Each person is allowed three-fourths of a pound of meat each nine days. All fish are exported. A person may purchase 24 cans of soda monthly.

Clothing is also rationed and not readily available in stores. Therefore, a black market flourishes. Children are given three toys per year on the third Sunday of July, a national holiday.

Stereo and television equipment is available only for government employees. The same is true for air conditioners and washing and sewing machines. Shortages exist in gas, electricity and water.

The Castro regime has banned all traditional holidays except for October 10, which marks Cuba's independence from Spain. New holidays are January 1, which in 1959 was the day Fidel Castro's rule started; May 1, the day of the workers; and July 25-27, which recalls the 1953 suicidal attack led by Fidel against the Batista government's military fortress at Moncada.

Religion is out of order. Christians of all kinds are persecuted. Saints' days cannot be celebrated, and Christmas and other Christian holy days are banned and ignored.

Other groups persecuted or jailed are those considered antisocial or whose values in any way are contrary to the government's decrees about what makes a "good" Communist. On this list are hippies, homosexuals, drug addicts and pushers, and prostitutes.

Political realities permeate all of society. Families are separated, alienated and divided by political ideologies. Women are expected to work but are not effective employees. Reports indicate that even on the job they continue the social patterns of the past that center in their homes and families. Children are taken from their parents at an early age and raised by the government.

When asked about Cuban culture today, one refugee responded, "In Cuba there is no culture." Films, music and books are censored. The public can attend only the exhibitions, concerts and plays the National Council of Culture sees fit to sponsor. Singers' lyrics must correspond to government philosophy. A national dance group is dedicated to the folk culture of Africa and Cuba. The country's foremost contemporary artistic figure is undoubtedly the prima ballerina, Alicia Alonso, who has worked hard to give the country a first-class ballet company.

Pearl of the Antilles

Cuba is called the "Pearl of the Antilles." Its name probably derives from the Indian *Cubanacan* or "center place." It is actually situated near the geographical center at the New World land mass and at a historic crossing of routes.

This tropical archipelago lies at the entrance of the Gulf of Mexico controlling approaches to Florida and Central America. Its 40,543 square miles, shaped like a sleeping crocodile, lie 48 miles west of the island home of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 87 miles north of the island of Jamaica and only 90 miles south of Key West, Fla. Haiti and Jamaica are visible on clear days.

Christopher Columbus discovered Cuba in 1492 during his search for a westward passage to India. There he raised the Spanish flag and named the island Juana in honor of the son of the Spanish rulers Ferdinand and Isabella.

In his reports Columbus declared Cuba the fairest land that human eyes had ever viewed. Its beauty is renowned.

Mountain ranges—the Sierra Maestra, the Sierra de Trinidad and the Guaniguanico—cover about a quarter of the total land area. On the ranges grow exotic hardwood forests that include mahogany, ebony and cedar. The Turquino, at 6,476 feet, is the highest mountain.

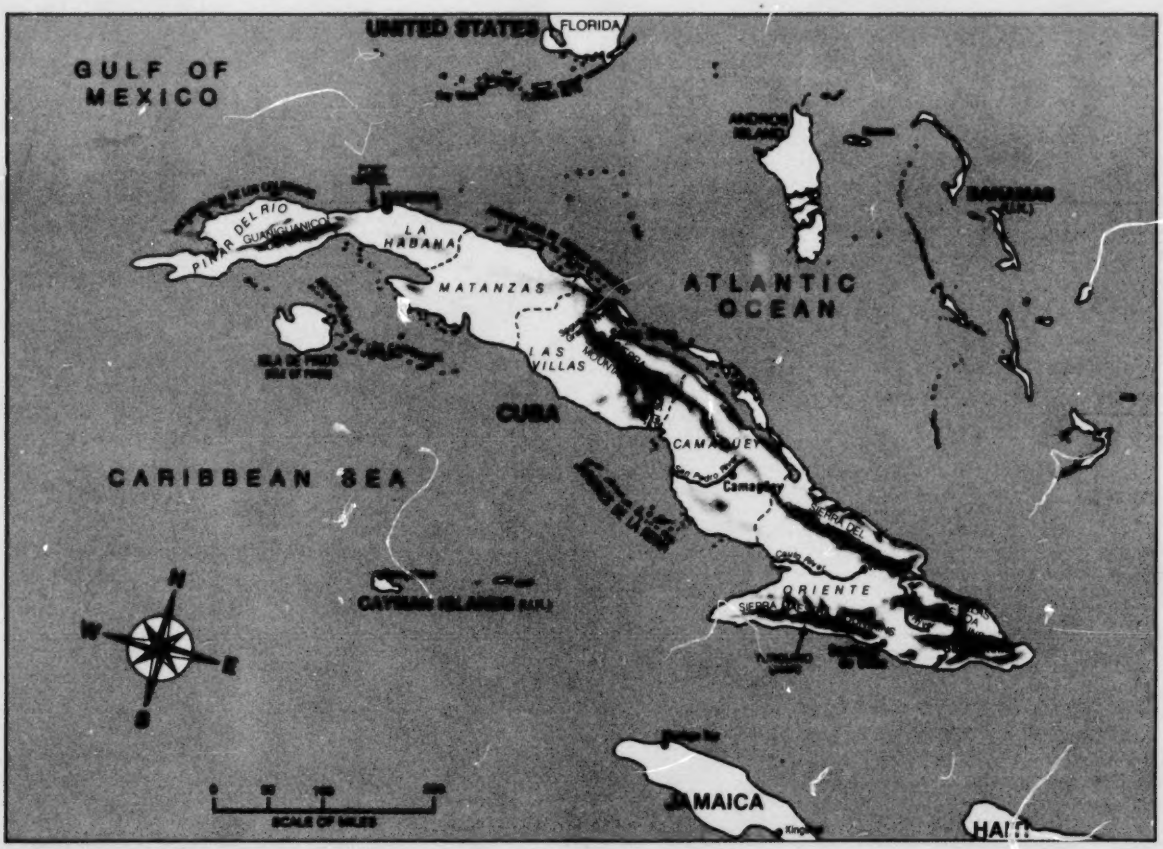
Cuba's valleys and rolling plains are fertile. It boasts sandy beaches along its 3,751-mile irregular coastline. Numerous bottle shaped harbors earned it a second nickname, "Isle of a Hundred Harbors."

Cuba's climate is cooled by northeast tradewinds that keep the temperature between 71 degrees in winter and 82 degrees in summer. During the dry season humidity is low, but the rainy season, extending between May and October, brings an average yearly rainfall of 54 inches. The rainy season means exposure to hurricanes. They have caused great economic damage and human suffering.

Palms of many varieties grow throughout the island, as do a wide range of flowers and fruit trees. Much of the original vegetation has been replaced by sugarcane, coffee and rice plantations.

Over 700 varieties of fish swim in Cuba's coastal waters and short rivers. Other wildlife abounds in the interior. Land reptiles include the large iguana. Scorpions, mosquitoes and other biting insects can be a torment.

Cuba has a rich variety of minerals and metals like iron, nickel, copper, chromium and barium. Oil was discovered in 1954.



The Indigenous Heritage

Cuba's Indian population at the time of Columbus' landing can only be estimated. The exaggerated report of one Spanish conquistador was 300,000, but a recent historian inclines toward a mere 16,000 Indians. The island probably had 50,000 inhabitants belonging to two tribes: the Ciboney or Guanahuatebey, who occupied Western Cuba, and the more numerous Taino, who occupied the balance of the land.

The aboriginal inhabitants were the Ciboney, whose name means "cave dweller." They apparently lived in caves at least part of the time. They also lived in huts on offshore islets and in swamps.

The Ciboney fled other Indians and whites alike. They were an easygoing, agile people who may have originated in Florida or Central America. A gouge they made from shells has been found in Florida. They subsisted primarily on shellfish.

The later dominant Tainos had their origins in South America and came into the Caribbean islands in several waves of migration. One was around 1450.

Soccer, played by Cuban refugees, is part of their heritage

Workers head to Cuba's metal-rich hills.

Tainos were of medium build with high cheekbones and brows, flat noses, straight hair and copper skin. They were intelligent and sociable but not physically strong. They did not write but had a numerical system.

The houses of the Tainos, called *bohios*, were made from palm and bamboo, without floors and with roofs that were renewed every two or three years. They could withstand the frequent hurricanes. They were grouped in communities of up to 3,000 people. A version of these houses is still built in rural Cuba.

Tainos traveled mainly by water in canoes. Clothing was minimal, and they painted their bodies for festivals. Palm shoots served as umbrellas.

Property was inherited through the mother or obtained as a gift at death or in marriage. The people were generous with gifts. They seldom stole, they did not clash, and they were not militant.

Food and other materials were supposedly held in common. The Taino diet included fish and game, fruits and cultivated vegetables. Fish were caught with arrows, harpoons or nets. Game was shot with arrows and flushed with a special breed of mute dogs. Meat was preserved several days by immersion in a pot of pepper.

The Tainos were highly developed agriculturalists. They worked the land with sharp sticks, cultivating mostly manioc. They ground coarse flour from the manioc root after its poisonous juice was wrung out. The flour was used to make cakes and also in soup and beer. Today manioc is still prepared in a similar way among Latin American Indian tribes.

Taino society was stratified. A chief headed the government. *Nitainos* or advisers supervised communual work and were in charge of various sectors of the population. A third stratum included the *behique* or tribal medicine man. Laborers made up the lowest class.

Only the chiefs were polygamous. Bridegrooms were required to pay for their brides. Promiscuity among youth was accepted, but adultery after marriage was punished by death. Divorce was rare.

Mothers prepared the food and shared in cultivating the land. Fathers were the main food providers and also the teachers of the young.

The Tainos' most notable illness was syphilis, which the Spanish transmitted to Europe. There it was first known as the "Spanish disease." Taino medicine men treated illness with herbs and religious rites. Euthanasia was acceptable for those considered incurable.

The Tainos played a type of soccer called *juego de batos*. Their teams met on an open court, which also served for important ceremonials and meetings at which tribal history was recited and sung to the younger generation.

Spanish Conquistadores

The main objective of the Spanish conquerors of Cuba was to find gold. The Taino Indians were impressed to labor in mines and on rivers until 1539, when the Spanish realized gold was a limited Cuban resource.

The Indians, later in conjunction with black slaves, revolted against barbarous treatment by the conquistadores. Within a half century their numbers were reduced to only a few scattered individuals. Hard labor in the gold mines, hunger resulting from low agricultural production and contagious diseases brought by the Europeans, for which the Indians had no natural immunities, all took their toll. Today's Indian remnant lives mostly in Oriente Province.

A Dominican friar, Bartolomé de Las Casas, often termed the "protector" of the Indians, preceded the Spanish conquerors into many villages. He persuaded the villagers to cooperate with the conquistadores but became horrified at their inhumane treatment and massacre. He condemned this cruelty in his writings, which later influenced Spain's Indian policy in the New World. The crown's official position was that the Indians were "free" subjects.

The Spaniards initiated an *encomienda* system for the Indians. It became a political instrument to establish control over the indigenous population. The Spanish leader assigned to each village extracted labor and tribute from the villagers and at the same time provided for their Christianization. Many of the *encomenderos* were absentee owners who delegated control to others. The overseers disregarded any moral, legal or religious obligations. Many Indians were bought and sold as chattel in spite of governmental insistence that they were not slaves.

For more than two centuries after Spain took over Cuba, the island remained primarily a rendezvous point for treasure galleons en route back from South and Central America. The harbor at Havana became a military stronghold, and the settlement grew into the third largest city in the Western Hemisphere after Mexico City and Lima, Peru. Once the British made an abortive attack, and the French succeeded in sacking the port. But Cuba for the most part remained impregnable.

When the search for gold proved disappointing, the Spaniards left untouched most of Cuba's resources. The little agricultural industry that developed was intended to provision passing ships. The Spaniards made little use of indigenous foods, preferring to introduce plants from home to maintain their accustomed diets. Tobacco was one exception. They cultivated it for their own use and later for the European market when its popularity there increased.

Sugarcane, which came to Spain with the Moors in the eighth century, became another important crop. But it was never cultivated on the scale of nearby British and French West Indian islands. About 100 sugar plantations lay outside Havana by the mid-1700's, each with its crude mill for producing sugar.

The largest exports from Cuba in the 16th and 17th centuries were beef products: dried beef jerky for the ships and leather. The latter was in great demand. Cattle ranches lay inland from Havana.

The governmental and legal systems which Spain applied to Cuba were rooted in a different heritage from that of the British and therefore also that of North America. The U.S. Constitution clearly defines legislative, executive and judicial functions. Spain governed through a process that was primarily judicial, and executive prerogatives were often unclear. The U.S. Constitution contains checks and balances that define parameters of each branch of government and have helped to maintain relative honesty within the branches. Spain's system was confusing and allowed corruption and graft to creep in more easily.

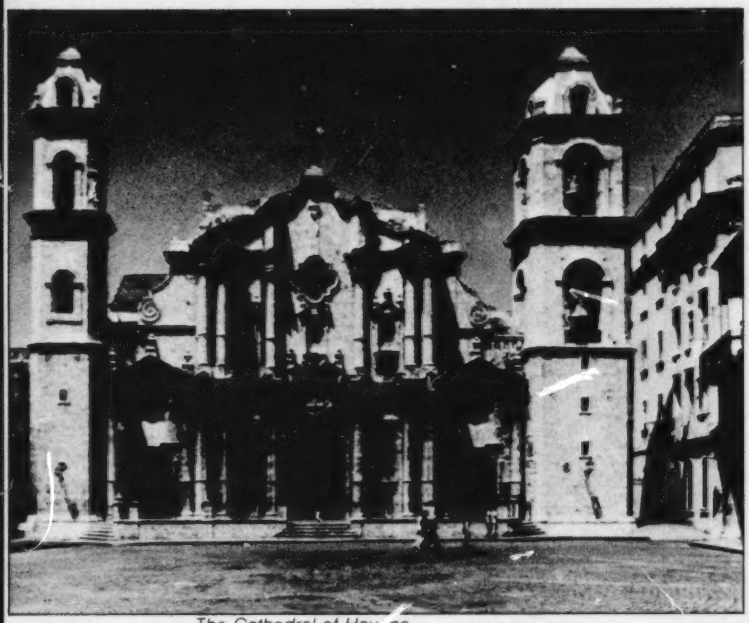
Mexico, also part of Spain's colonial empire, was of major importance because of its treasure yield. The chief political figure in New Spain, the viceroy, was located in Mexico City. He in turn assigned Cuba to the judiciary *audiencia* in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, who had Spanish judges appointed from Madrid. A captain general, another Spaniard, served in Cuba itself. Because the viceroy and *audiencia* were at a distance, the captain general most often acted on his own.

Mounted cavalry reflect Cuba's past.

At the local level of the political process was Havana's town council, originally an elective body selected by the landowners. In time money became the decisive factor. The Spanish crown in the person of the captain general sold each office, a lifetime position. Buyers were the sugar mill owners. The officers or *regidores* directed justice, distributed land, fixed prices and eventually controlled the economic life of the nation. This system became self-perpetuating and corrupt, passed down to succeeding generations.

In the 19th century the *regidores*, by then a "sugar oligarchy," played a major part in Cuba's international relations. The *regidores* were Creoles, or native Cubans, and not Spaniards. Of course, Spanish officials often intermarried with Creoles and elected to remain permanently in Cuba.

When Spain colonized Cuba, the Protestant Reformation of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli had not yet swept Europe. Spain was Roman Catholic. The conquistadores had a dual purpose: find treasure to enrich the crown's coffers and convert the Cubans to their brand of Christianity.



The Cathedral of Havana

The eighth century invasion of the Hispanic peninsula from Africa by the Moors had effectively cut Spain out of participation with the rest of Europe. The Moors came when Charlemagne was uniting Northern Europe into what became the Holy Roman Empire—the very empire that political advocates of the Reformation helped to crumble. Scandinavia at the time of the Moorish invasion was still pagan and was sending its Viking explorers west to Greenland and beyond.

Over succeeding centuries Spanish efforts went toward ousting the infidel invaders. This bred a unique brand of Catholicism. The Spaniards had fierce antagonism toward anything that sounded heretical. In their efforts to purify Catholicism, they became the home of the dreaded Inquisition. Spanish Renaissance painters have recorded on their canvases the brooding, suffering and mysticism that marked their religion.

Spain finally ousted the Moors the same year that Columbus proposed to the Spanish rulers new trade routes to India. The conquerors at home exuberantly took on the New World. Everywhere they went they made Catholicism the state religion.

The church, like the government, ruled from Spain. In Havana Spanish style churches housed the faithful at mass. Religious holidays became national festivals. All Cuba celebrated the day of the Ascension of the Virgin, *Dia de la Caridad del Cobre*, who was Cuba's patron saint. Four weeks before Lent rich and poor alike participated in a carnival. The wealthy went to costume balls, while the slaves and poor danced in the streets to their drums and music. During Holy Week religious processions paraded through the streets, marked with all the pomp and splendor that accompanied the same celebrations in Spain. Each Cuban had his or her saint's day, as important as a birthday.

Priests came from the homeland. Cubans choosing priestly vocations went to Spain for training since no seminary was ever established on the island.

Along with the churches and priests came the Roman Catholic holy orders. Havana had monasteries and convents—Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, a convent dedicated to Santa Clara, a nunnery of Santa Catalina. The orders founded educational institutions and hospitals. Creole girls went to convents, and boys attended Jesuit colleges.

The church required that slaves imported from Africa to labor on the cattle ranches and sugar plantations and to work in the cities be educated in Christianity and baptized and married by the priests. On the one hand the Africans adopted Christianity to appease the church. On the other they kept the religious practices they had brought from Africa, blending them together with the religion forced on them.

Britain's Brief Rule

In North America in 1762 the French and Indian War neared an end, with what control the French had in the New World about to give way to Great Britain. In the Caribbean French island possessions were falling to British naval power. To ward off further losses France negotiated an alliance with Spain. Britain countered by also declaring war on Spain and launching an attack on Havana from a base at Portsmouth, Va. Capturing this strategic city promised military glory and profit.

The attack began early in June. On July 30 English troops stormed the Spanish fort of El Morro, which guarded the harbor. In early August Cuba fell to new conquerors.

One year later, in a political tradeoff, the British signed Cuba back to Spain and departed to continue to struggle with France on European soil in the Seven Years' War of 1756-63. The machinations of three world powers had briefly made Cuba part of their political strategies and then had made it expendable.

During the one year of British domination, three seemingly unrelated events occurred that set in motion Cuba's course for the future and affected the heart of its economic and political life.

The first was that Cuba was opened to world trade after years of sending goods only to Spain. British merchant princes soon followed the British flag into Havana. Second was the discovery in Havana warehouses of 500 tons of sugar. Third was the permission the English governor gave a trader to import 2,000 slaves a year to Cuba.

The stage was set for the 19th century, King Sugar and the muscle used to produce the sugar.

Sugarcane harvest

Tourists in Cuba inspect Spanish building.

Sugar and Slavery

Sugarcane produces sugar, molasses and rum. After the British opened Cuba's ports to the world and Europe and North America's sweet tooth developed, Cuba's sugar market grew. To produce more sugar, more land had to be cleared; more cane grown, harvested and pressed; and more sap cooked.

Until the industrial revolution reached Cuba in the late 1800's, slave muscle was the source of sugar. The formula was simple: producing more sugar meant buying more African slaves with more money. The Africans also filled the gap left by the destruction of the natives.

Cuba's plantations and mills were slow moving, cumbersome affairs. Other West Indian islands would soon harness water power to drive the mills, but Cuba had no such sources of power. From the beginning Cuba's plantations had relied on slaves to clear forests, plant and harvest. Oxen helped lug wood to fire the sap kettles and to turn the mill presses, but otherwise black slaves provided the energy.

Slaves were initially brought by the conquistadores from southern Spain and later were shipped from Senegal and the Guinea coast—800,000 in all. By early in the 1800's they made up over 40 per cent of the population, and people of black ancestry were in the majority.

Intent on riches, the Hispano-Cuban landholders converted from tobacco or beef to sugar, although they continued some beef production to feed the slaves. By 1830, 500,000 acres were in sugarcane.

Slaves cost money, and banks did not yet exist. Many in the plantation business bought on credit or borrowed from merchants.

Unlike England, Spain had always had slavery and developed its own code of slave ownership, treatment and privilege. Slavery in Cuba differed enormously from slavery in Britain's American colonies, just as the two governmental systems were significantly different.

Slaves in Cuba were recognized by the church as Christians. They were not enveloped in a miasma of evil as in America. They could marry. They could own and exchange property, though on death their property reverted to the slave owner. They could purchase their own freedom or that of their families, and they were often allowed to work on the side to earn money toward that end. Once the first installment toward freedom was paid, they could seek employment away from their owner. The birthright of children of slaves by free women was freedom. Owners often freed their children born of slave mothers. None of this occurred in the United States.

Some Cuban slave owners, of course, did not honor the Spanish code. Brutality and harsh treatment was inflicted, especially under plantation overseers. Brought to Cuba against their wills, owned as property, and divested of freedom but never the dream of freedom, the slaves often sought to be free through suicide, escape or group revolt. Until the abolition of slavery in 1886, such revolts erupted regularly.

The significantly less negative attitude toward blacks engendered in Cuban society by the code is still apparent today. The code also brought many free blacks and free people of mixed blood to the cities, where they became artisans and even shop owners.

Cuba and the West Indies were one point in a slaving triangle. Ships sailed to Africa and loaded with slaves. Then they crossed the Atlantic to Cuba to swell the sugar industry, reloaded with sugar products and ran north to the United States or northeast to England.

As the U.S. expanded, it became the chief importer of Cuban sugar. This economic factor played a large role in Cuban history during the next years. A second factor was the abolition of slavery.

The abolitionist movement spread rapidly in the 19th century. Spain and other Latin American countries had emancipated the slaves by the middle of the century. But in Cuba, where slaves meant wealth, the sugar oligarchy fought to preserve their base of power.

In the 1840's the U.S. also still condoned slavery. Cuban economic leaders began a movement to have the U.S. annex Cuba. This was in the same era when Texas, formerly a part of Mexico, was annexed by the U.S. The movement continued even after the Civil War ended slavery in the states.

On October 10, 1868, at a sugar mill called La Demajagua in Oriente Province, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes formally freed his slaves and began a conflict with Spain that raged from 1868 to 1878, the Ten Years' War. Spain prevailed but later abolished Cuba's slavery.

Leaders of the rebellion fled to exile in the U.S. in the first massive refugee exit from Cuba. They continued to fight from the states for Cuban independence and to try to influence the U.S. government. The most articulate freedom fighter emerged in the person of José Martí, who became a national hero.

The landholders in Cuba next turned to China for a new source of labor. Between 1853 and 1874 they imported 125,000 Chinese coolies, nearly all of them Cantonese. Inhumane conditions reduced their numbers to 14,000 by the 1899 census.

"Free" at Last

With slavery an institution of the past, the old Cuba was gone, just as the old South died in the Civil War. Yet Cuban life seemed much the same on the surface. The sugar oligarchy clung desperately to control and became increasingly reactionary in its political outlook. Mechanization crept into the sugar industry, and the industrial revolution invaded the island.

U.S. business, in that laissez-faire era, began to acquire land and other holdings on the island and financed the embryonic sugar refining industry. Sugar mills on the plantations also became a thing of the past. Eventually most of Cuba's sugar went to consumers in the U.S., partly because of its close geographical location. Spain became more remote in its influence, even as Spain itself was unstable in the late 19th century.

When a new Cuban revolution broke out in 1895, U.S. public opinion favored the rebels. Cuban exiles in the states helped fan the flames. So did William Randolph Hearst's newspaper empire through reports sent by his correspondents and cartoons by the artist Frederic Remington.

In 1898 the battleship Maine, which the United States had sent to Havana for an unclear purpose, mysteriously exploded in Havana harbor. This was the cue for U.S. intervention in the Cuban-Spanish conflict.

Cuba was "freed" from Spain in 1898. A U.S. military government took over and continued to dominate Cuban political life until 1902. In 1906 the Cuban president asked the U.S. to help quell an uprising. American control lasted this time until 1909.

Perhaps the most significant factor shaping the period was the insertion of the Platt amendment into the 1901 constitution of the newly "independent" Cuba. The amendment specifically allowed the United States to intervene in Cuban affairs. It was opposed by Cuban liberals, but for the next 60 years U.S. economic and political influence loomed large in the life of the island nation. The Platt amendment was finally abolished in 1934.

Democracy as understood and practiced in the states did not survive in Cuba, despite free elections. In 1924 General Gerardo Machado was chosen head of the Cuban government and ruled autocratically until an army insurrection in 1933 brought a former sergeant, Fulgencio Batista, to power. The army allied its forces with Cuban political liberals.

Batista, whether in office or not, became a virtual dictator. Corruption and graft, rooted in the days of the *regidores* system of Spanish Cuba, once more flourished. Batista's bureaucrats grabbed power and wealth. The corruption often extended to the local town councils, which were elected by the people in a semblance of the democratic process. Liberal forces and university student clubs advocated political change but without success.

The police and *Servicio de Inteligencia Militar* enforced the government's control. Later hundreds of Cubans were thrust into dungeons, where they endured torture and death.

During this period universal military service was not demanded. Young men could volunteer for the army at 21.

Economically the country remained dependent on the sugar industry, now largely owned and controlled by North American companies. In spite of large-scale unemployment in seasons between the cane crops, some work was available in places other than on plantations.

Havana and other cities had many homeless and poverty stricken people on the streets. Begging was common, despite social services set up by the government.

Freedom of religion existed. The Roman Catholic Church remained as the main religious force on the island, but 80,000 Protestants, including Lutherans, also had congregations. Sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventists attracted a following, mostly among the poorer people.

Public education was universal but not compulsory. It was not effective, and truant officers were unknown. The education system was the same as in the U.S., not the system followed in Europe.

The illiteracy rate was high, particularly in rural areas, where schools went only through the first six grades. The teachers, city bred and city trained, usually commuted to their rural jobs for the day and then returned to their homes for social activities.

Private schools were often run by the Catholic Church or Catholic orders. They flourished for well-to-do families, who often sent their offspring to the U.S. for preparatory or university training.

Cuba celebrated Independence Day on May 20 and another related holiday on October 10. January 28 commemorated the birth of the national hero, José Martí, and March 10 was declared a holiday to honor Batista's rise to power.

Religious holidays abounded: a three-day carnival before Ash Wednesday, Easter, Pentecost and Christmas. The feast of the Epiphany, January 6, was a special holiday throughout the Caribbean. Voodoo held an important place in the nation's festival life.

Fidel! Fidel!

Fidel Castro grew up in the province where the Ten Years' War for independence had raged less than a century before. He attended a Jesuit school in Havana. While there he was much impressed by the teachings of two Spanish priests who were "Falangist" admirers of Francisco Franco, then ruler of Spain.

In 1940 Fidel was admitted to study law at Havana University. In 1947, while still a law student, he became involved in an abortive expedition to overthrow Trujillo's dictatorship in Santo Domingo. In 1948, while the Ninth Inter-American Conference was being held in Bogota, Colombia, he helped disrupt the conference after the leader of Colombia's Liberal Party, Jorge E. Gaitan, was assassinated. He also aided in the violent riots that followed.

In 1953 the young insurrectionist, with his coterie of fellow revolutionaries, not yet Communists but certainly with Marxist-Socialist leanings, attacked the Moncada army barracks. The unsuccessful attack launched the "July 26th Movement" and is now celebrated in Cuba as a national holiday.

Fidel Castro

Fidel Castro went into exile in Mexico. There he was influenced by socialists who advocated rule by the workers. He met and joined forces with the Argentinian Marxist Che Guevara, who returned to Cuba with Fidel when he began his guerrilla warfare from the Sierra Maestra mountains in 1956.

Two years later civil war broke out in force. Batista's days of leadership were numbered. University students, the labor movement, the Communist Party and urban moderates united with Fidel's guerrillas to drive the dictator into exile in 1959. The war was one of nerves as well as open conflict, and the political unrest helped undermine the nation's economy.

Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionaries were radicalized, by his own later admission, during the months of guerrilla fighting beside the poor rural peasants. He emerged a national hero, partly because throughout Cuban history the people have rallied around charismatic leadership as much as around causes.

Threatened by the Cuban revolution, the United States labeled it the first Communist foothold in the hemisphere. The U.S. provided dollars, arms and CIA training to Cuban exiles in Guatemala for an invasion of their homeland. These preparations ended in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. The next year the U.S. began an economic blockade which has endured to this day.

Fidel Castro countered by attacking U.S. "imperialism" and its virtual monopoly of Cuban interests. U.S. property in the country, including banks, was seized and nationalized.

Although Marxist in philosophy, Fidel at the time was not aligned with the hard core Communist Party of Cuba or with the USSR. Instead an uneasy coalition of moderates called the *fidelistas* and the Communist Party seesawed back and forth in conflict over Cuba's future direction. Fidel prevailed through the strength of his personality and because he was an uncanny political opportunist.

Fidel Castro believed in the struggle of the workers toward an ultimate utopia where economic equality would be a reality, poverty would be abolished and the people would rule through direct participation. Ever an activist, he set about creating his utopia by reorganizing the government and the economy. He distrusted bureaucracies of any kind and was determined that under his rule no such spider's web would be created. He made the decisions, although he was often inconsistent.

Having lost its major market for sugar and tobacco, Cuba opened trade talks with the USSR and also let the Soviet Union install missiles on Cuban territory. This led to the confrontation between

U.S. President John F. Kennedy and USSR Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The USSR backed off and removed the missiles but continued to woo Cuba through economic means.

To realize his dream of direct worker participation, Fidel attempted to restructure Cuban society on the moral premise of cooperation rather than competitition. The problem was that the workers did not incorporate his dream into the reality of their work lives. Former incentives were gone: no one got fired, no one achieved more economic well-being through hard work, no one was punished through pay reductions. All workers had pesos, but the money was useless. They had no goods to buy. Absenteeism rose.

A further problem for Fidel Castro was meshing party politics and policy into the administrative processes of government. Conflict continued between the *fidelistas* and the Communist Party despite Fidel's unquestioned dominance in governmental and political decision making. In effect, the workers' utopia was coming from the top down, from the Central Committee and its small coterie of loyal Fidel Castro fans, not from the grassroots up.

A major change occurred in 1970. Fidel had proclaimed a goal of harvesting 10 million tons of sugarcane. The country fell short of the goal. This led Cuba to move its economic policies and political organization closer to the brand of communism found in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Fidel Castro has in no way abdicated leadership, but through encouraging workers to join the Communist Party, he has ensured a grassroots participation in the party that will endure beyond his personal charismatic leadership.

Individual freedom of thought, preference in dress and cultural hobbies, chances for advancement and education do not exist in Fidel Castro's Cuba as Americans understand them. The country has figuratively and literally tightened its belt and abolished old standards in its quest to achieve a workers' paradise that promises plenty for all and privilege to none. The dream is age old, one shared by all with humanitarian values.

Cuba's chance of attaining this utopian goal rests only on the incorruptibility of its rulers. So far in world history no group in power has ever been able to resist corruption, human nature being what it is. From earliest colonial times Cuba has a governmental tradition of corruptibility and graft.

The perspective of those committed to "the Revolution" remains united and determined. As the Cuban newspaper *Granma* recently wrote: "In these 21 years no country in this hemisphere has done more to wipe out unemployment, poverty, ignorance, illness, gambling, drugs or prostitution. . . . No other country struggles with greater sacrifice to overcome social and economic underdevelopment. We have fulfilled our most sacred duties as a nation for the good of its children."

Cuban students at a boarding school

A ballet class rehearses in a former social club.